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ABSTRACT

Due to excessive tardiness and absenteeism among kindergarten children enrolled in Glendale Elementary School (Glen Burnie, Maryland) a practicum was designed to provide several avenues of good communication between the kindergarten and the home and to foster good relationships between teachers and parents. Additional goals of the practicum were to increase the number of parent observations in the classroom and to decrease the percentage of unexcused absences. Intervention consisted of home visits, parent/teacher conferences, parent observations in the classroom, teacher-initiated telephone calls when a student was absent, newsletters, and an evening open house. A follow-up survey indicated that parents increased their awareness of the importance of the kindergarten program. Parent observations in the classroom increased to 70 percent of the families. Unexcused absences decreased by a small percentage. (Author/RH)

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PRACTICUM REPORT

Ed.D. Program in Early and Middle Childhood

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BUILDING POSITIVE PARENT-TEACHER RELATIONSHIPS IN KINDERGARTEN

PRACTICUM I SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE
EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION PROGRAM
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

BY

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January 1983

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ABSTRACT

Building Positive Parent-Teacher Relationships in Kindergarten
Goodall, Joanne D., 1983: Practicum I Report, Nova University Ed.D. Program in Early Childhood
Descriptors: Kindergarten/parent Education/Home-School Communication

This practicum was designed to provide several avenues of communication between the kindergarten and the home and to foster good relationships between the teacher and parents. A second aim was to increase the number of parent observations in the classroom. A third aim was to decrease the percentage of unexcused absences. The need for the practicum was established by comments of the parents, many unexcused absences on the part of some students, and by a survey of parents.

The solution strategy consisted of home visits, parent-teacher conferences, parent observations in the classroom, teacher-initiated telephone calls when a student was absent, newsletters, and an evening open house.

A follow-up survey indicated that parents increased their awareness of the importance of the kindergarten program. Parent observations in the classroom increased to 70% of the families. Unexcused absences decreased by a small percentage.

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Chapter One - The Introduction

A. The County and the School System

Anne Arundel County, Maryland, is known for the variety of water-oriented activities available. With a long coastline along the Chesapeake Bay and many rivers and creeks, it offers sailing, fishing, crabbing, swimming, wind-surfing, and power boating. The maritime industry is very important. Many people interested in water sports come each October from all over the United States and from foreign countries to attend the Sailboat and Power Boat Shows. The state capital, Annapolis, a city of 32,000 people, 24 miles south of Baltimore and 33 miles east of Washington, D.C., is the location of the U.S. Naval Academy, which offers specialized higher education to approximately 4000 midshipmen each year. The Academy is also a focal point for visitors, with parents coming to see the midshipmen on special occasions and the general public coming to view sports events. Annapolis and the surrounding county have many historic buildings and landmarks. An estimated three million tourists come each year to enjoy this heritage. 1.

In 1980, Anne Arundel County had a population of 370,775. Its area is 416 square miles in a generally long narrow shape from north to south. The citizenry refer to it as "South County" and "North County". South County is a rural farming area. The largest employer in the county is Westinghouse Electric Corporation in North County, which employs 12,500 people.

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1. Clark, Michael J. Annapolis. Sun Magazine, October 10,1982, p. 25.

Sixty-seven thousand residents commute outside the county to work, many in the District of Columbia. The 1980 average weekly wage of those employed was $268. At that time, the annual average unemployment was 8,689 and underemployment by reason of hours worked was 16,300. 2.

The Anne Arundel County school system is divided into four administrative areas with the Board of Education building in Annapolis. In 1981-82, the most recent school year for which figures are available, there were 119 public schools operated by the Anne Arundel County Board of Education. Of these, there were seventy-four elementary schools, sixteen middle/junior high schools, thirteen senior high schools, two vocational-technical centers, eight special education schools, one learning center for pupils with behavioral difficulties, four evening high schools, and one outdoor education facility. Attending these schools were 67,502 students; and they were taught by 3,938 teachers and aides. The school system's operating budget was $162,889,960, for an average expenditure per pupil of $2,354. 3. In October 1982 the estimated enrollment is 65,427, with a corresponding drop in teachers. 4.

Early childhood education was begun in Anne Arundel County in the mid-1960's with 400 children enrolled in kindergarten classes funded by Title I. By 1970, a voluntary kindergarten program was available to all eligible children through county funding. Kindergarten is not mandatory

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2. Anne Arundel County, Maryland. Maryland Department of Economic and Community Development. January 1982.

3. Pathway to educational excellence. Anne Arundel County Board of Education. August 1982, p. 3.

4. Pascal says school board doesn't need twelve teachers. Arundel Sun. October 13, 1982, p.1.

in the State of Maryland. If his/her parents so choose, a child who is five years old by December 31st of that year may enter kindergarten in September.

Beginning in September 1979, a state-funded Extended Elementary Education Program (EEEP) was begun. In Anne Arundel County it was initiated at Tyler Heights Elementary School with 45 four-year-olds. Another program was begun at Freetown Elementary School in January 1980 with 30 students and another in March 1980 at Glendale Elementary School, also with 30 students. Glendale Elementary School was selected for the program because space was available for the additional class. The EEEP continues to operate in the three county schools, but it is done on a year-to-year basis as the county has not assumed responsibility for funding the program. Beginning on January 18, 1983, Glendale Elementary School is to be a demonstration center for the Extended Elementary Education Program, so many visitors and observers are expected in grades pre-kindergarten through third.

B. The Neighborhood and the Local School

Glendale Elementary School is in Glen Burnie, Maryland, which is inland and about 15 miles north of Annapolis on the main highway between Annapolis and Baltimore. Glen Burnie was developed shortly after WWII to house returning GI's. From south Glen Burnie to Baltimore both sides of the highway are lined with drive-ins and commercial establishments so that town boundaries are not evident to a traveler. The northern edge of Glen Burnie is slightly within the Baltimore beltway.

Glendale Elementary School serves the subdivisions of Glen Gardens, Glenwood, Glendale Terrace, and the eastern part of Harundale. These are single-family homes which range from 900 to 1200 square feet of living area. The lot sizes are about a fifth of an acre. Currently, houses in these communities are advertised in the real estate section of the newspaper for $55,000 to $65,000.

Since it is in the northern part of the county, Glendale Elementary School is in Administrative Area I. Dr. Richard Milbourne is the Area Director. The main building of the school, dedicated in 1950, is a three-story red brick structure designed to accommodate 1000 pupils. About five years ago, with the enrollment declining, one corridor was boarded off and Phoenix Glendale, a school for emotionally handicapped students, was created. It is physically within Glendale Elementary, but it is administratively a separate school. In the past, some of the Phoenix Glendale students have been mainstreamed into Glendale Elementary classes; and the music, art, physical education, media, and speech teachers have instructed groups of Phoenix Glendale students. However, in 1982-83 only art, speech, and media instruction is supplied by Glendale Elementary faculty.

The present enrollment of Glendale Elementary for 1982-83 is 536. The student population is predominantly Caucasian, with only about six Black students and six students of Oriental background.

The faculty of Glendale Elementary consists of eighteen and one-half classroom teachers (one kindergarten teacher is half-time), one physical education teacher, one part-time instrumental music teacher, two special education teachers (one for levels 1, 2, and 3 and one for level 4), one speech teacher, one reading resource specialist, one primary teacher specialist, one music teacher, one art teacher, and one media specialist. There is also an aide for the EEEP class. The teacher-student ratio is approximately 1 to 26.

These teachers are supervised by the principal, Mr. Marvin Heptinstall, and the assistant principal; and they are supported by the services of a part-time school psychologist and a part-time pupil personnel worker. Glendale Elementary has been designated a Chapter I school. However, since no funding is currently available and other schools have greater needs, no advantages are gained by the designation. There are no Chapter I aides.

About twelve years ago, a one-story building was erected approximately fifty yards from the main school building, and this is where the pre-school (pre-kindergarten and kindergarten) pupils are housed. This smaller building is air-conditioned and contains two carpeted classrooms, each about 25 by 60 feet. The classrooms share an ~~an~~ entry hall, a tile-floored art area, and two areas presently used for storage of instructional and art materials. Each classroom has two bathrooms. There is an intercom system for communicating with the school office in the main building.

In 1982-83, 36 children are enrolled in the Extended Elementary Education class at Glendale Elementary, 18 in each session; and they are instructed by their teacher and an aide. These pre-kindergarteners are in one of the two large classrooms in the smaller building.

The kindergarten children are in the other classroom. During the morning session there are two teachers in the kindergarten room, each with a class of 24 students. The teachers do some team teaching, especially small-group work, music, art, and story-time. In the afternoon session, there is one kindergarten teacher with a class of 25 students.

The teachers' responsibilities include instructing the children according to the curriculum prescribed by the Anne Arundel County Board of Education, identifying children who need special help or instruction, planning with resource personnel for individualized programs, keeping and reporting required information, collecting money, recruiting and supervising parent volunteers, and reporting pupil progress to parents. The speech therapist does remedial work with selected children; otherwise, the kindergarten classes are self-contained. The writer is the full-time kindergarten teacher and has been teaching at Glendale Elementary for the past nine years.

A total of 49 children are assigned to the full-time kindergarten teacher. Of these, twenty-one attended the EEEP class the previous year. Nineteen live more than one-half mile from school and are transported by bus. Four are brought to school and met afterwards by babysitters. Approximately 35% (17) of the children have mothers who work outside the home. This percentage has declined since the previous school year. Whether this is because of the mothers' choice or because of difficulties in obtaining work is unknown; however one child recently had his house key on a shoestring around his neck because "Mom's gone to the unemployment office and won't be home when I get off the bus". Another child mentioned that "My mother needs to find another job".

Approximately 16% (8) of the children live with only one parent. This percentage also has dropped with this class as compared with 1981-82, when 33% (18 of 54 children) of that class were living with either one parent or a parent and a step-parent.

The parents' last grade in school, for those who chose to note it on their child's registration form, ranges from sixth grade to graduate study. Thirteen of the parents did not report their last school grade, fifteen reported between sixth and eleven grade, fifty-five reported twelfth grade, and 15 reported some further education or training. It should be remarked upon that two of the fathers, who both work for the government, report post-graduate study. In the nine years that this writer has read the registration forms, it has been unusual to note a father with college level study; and, thus, finding two fathers with post-graduate study is rare. The half-time kindergarten teacher reports that none of her group's parents have had college level training.

Positions or employers listed by the fathers include: dump truck driver for a trash service, Montgomery Ward's, A & P, Bethlehem Steel, Maryland State patrolman, and installer for an outdoor sign company. Positions or employers listed by some mothers who work outside the home include: Maryland Department of Motor Vehicles, school bus driver, uniform presser at the Naval Academy, Pappy's Pizza, store clerk, and waitress. In this community, being a waitress or barmaid is considered a very good job because the father can care for the children while the mother works.

Chapter Two - The Problem

A. Description of the Problem

It was noted earlier that Glendale School serves a student population that has been designated as Chapter I. According to the standards for Chapter I schools, a significant number of the students are economically deprived or educationally below grade level.

In the case of some of the kindergarten children, their progress was hindered by indifference of the parents. Over the past several years, as attendance registers document, some children have been tardy or absent to an excessive extent; and the absences were not occasioned by illness. When questioned, several of the parents stated frankly, "Its too much trouble to send (the child) to kindergarten for only two and a half hours". Last Spring, the mother of a girl who had missed 78 days explained, "Its too hard in the morning to get dressed and take her to school". This mother later tried to enroll her daughter in parochial school for first grade; but the child was rejected after testing because she lacked the required readiness skills. Another parent commented, "I'll wake her up in the mornings when she gets to regular school". And the mother of an afternoon session kindergartener said, "I can't leave my bowling league early to get her to school, so she has to miss Wednesdays".

In some cases there were misunderstandings by parents. On one occasion, a father decided to withdraw his daughter from kindergarten mid-way through the year. The child seemed happy and was doing very well in the program; and when the father was asked why he wanted to withdraw her, he said that she would come home and tell about playing games that day.

He explained he wanted his daughter to "learn" in school. The situation was easily settled when the teacher showed him an assortment of the teaching games used in class and explained their purpose. The teacher also showed him his daughter's progress on the skills check-list. The father left his child in kindergarten.

The teacher was disturbed by these instances because she had informed the parents of their children's progress in school. She had reviewed the Kindergarten Conference Form, discussed other matters particular to that child, and invited and answered any questions. Still, by their remarks the parents sometimes exhibited a lack of knowledge about what was happening in class. It was as if they believed their child wouldn't miss anything by being absent. It seemed that some parents did not comprehend the value to their children of the pre-school program well enough to support it.

This view was supported by an informal survey given at the beginning of the 1982 school year to 48 parents of kindergarteners. In it, parents were asked to respond to the statement "I understand the academic program offered in my child's class" on a scale from 1 to 5, with 1 being low and 5 high. Eleven circled the 1, eight circled the 2, fourteen circled the 3, eight circled the 4, and only seven circled the 5. (Appendix A)

Hopefully, if the parents had more information showing that kindergarten could assist in the development of their children, they would support the program. A good teacher - parent relationship was needed.

The Anne Arundel County Board of Education recognizes the importance of sharing information between teacher and parent. Conferences are scheduled three times per year for the parents of kindergarten children. At Glendale Elementary, there is a thirty minute conference upon the child's entrance into school and a twenty minute conference in November and again in April. At each of these conferences a form is followed. At the first conference, the Parent Interview Checklist is used by the teacher to obtain and record background information about each child. Before the November and April conferences, the teacher completes the Kindergarten Conference Form and then uses it as the basis of the conference. Obviously, discussion does not have to be limited to those items on the forms. In an effort to keep parents informed, the principal of Glendale School issues a newsletter every other Friday; and this year the primary teacher specialist plans to issue a newsletter each month.

Conferences and school-wide newsletters, while good, needed to be complemented by other methods of reaching, sharing, and planning with parents. With increased communication came better understanding by both teacher and parent. This paper addressed the challenge of building positive teacher - parent relationships in kindergarten.

B. Possible Causes of the Problem

There seemed to be several factors contributing to the parents' not having a clear picture of the kindergarten program and what their child could gain from it. One was that kindergarten is not mandatory in the State of Maryland. Parents seemed to think that if pre-school is not mandatory, it follows that it must not be important; and so, if it was inconvenient to get their child to school, they just didn't bother. Also, kindergarten has not been available in the county long enough so that the parents attended it. Parents were familiar with day care situations and equated the kindergarten program with those. They sometimes expressed their belief that pre-school education is playschool with an emphasis mainly on social adjustment, and therefore nothing the child couldn't do in the neighborhood. Along this line, some parents did not understand that the "games" the children use are teaching materials. Often when a child needs to practice a skill or concept, such as matching capital and lower-case letters, the teacher gives him/her a game designed to help achieve mastery. The parents heard the children refer to "games" and assumed games are only for fun.

A cause of the problem peculiar to Glendale Elementary was that the pre-school programs are housed in a separate building from the one housing grades one through six. The parents expressed confusion over whether kindergarten is part of the "regular" school. Before holidays, parents asked, "Will this school be closed like the regular one?" On days when Glendale Elementary was closed due to snow, parents called the office to ask, "Does that mean the kindergarten too?" Since the pre-school is not physically connected with the main building, some parents did not see the grades as a continuum.

Reaching out to parents was often affected by transportation. Since so many of the children were bus-riders and others were met by babysitters, some parents did not visit the classroom informally to see what the students were doing or ask questions of the teacher. Even if the parents did come in when they met their children, the teacher's attention was divided because she had other children to watch until their parents came for them. Exchanges between parents and teacher were limited under such conditions.

Parents were strongly encouraged to come for conferences. However, it was possible that parents were conscious of the limited time and other parents waiting and of the check list or conference form; and perhaps they felt some restraint about mentioning concerns. When the parents listened politely and smiled, the teacher believed she had informed them of their children's progress and assumed they knew what was happening in school. It may be that the parents were not comfortable in the conference situation.

Another factor was the large number of parents the teacher had to acquaint with the program. At the kindergarten level, the Board of Education has recommended a class size of 22 students per teacher, which means 44 students per day for a full-time kindergarten teacher. However, children do not come in neat packages of 22. In the past nine years at Glendale Elementary, the number of students assigned to the full-time teacher has ranged from 44 to 57. Aides were assigned during two school years. The year there were 55 children, there was a full-time aide; and the year there were 57 children, an aide was shared with another class. It is not easy to establish good teacher - parent relationships when that many people are involved.

The teacher was busy planning, assessing, teaching, keeping records, and so could see the child's skills develop; but the parent perhaps was unaware of the child's progress. Full information must be given to each parent; and the last parent conference must be just as informative and enthusiastic as the first. Three days are allowed for thirty-minute conferences in August. Two days are allowed for twenty-minute conferences in November and April. Even for the teacher who has the recommended class size of 44 students and is extremely interested in each child, 44 twenty-minute conferences in two days can be very wearing, especially on the voice. Above a certain number of students an extra half-day or full day can be allowed at the principal's discretion.

C. Review of Related Literature

In the article "Parents and Professionals: an Uneasy Relationship", Phyllis Sonnenschein detailed parents' perceived difficulties in establishing satisfactory relationships with educators. 5. Sometimes parents reported that their opinions were not considered. Parents want information to help in the education of their children. To improve relationships between parents and professionals, both must form a partnership with mutual respect and trust. E. J. Smith and C. B. G. London maintained that education cannot be accomplished by the school alone. 6. They reported that some teachers hold stereotypical views of parents, believing that parents who do not have much formal education themselves will not place much value on education for their children. They suggested that some professionals may have to alter their perceptions of their roles and of others before establishing successful relationships with parents.

That parents and teachers must build an alliance if improvement is to be made in the education of children was the theme of Helen Suchara's article, "Parents and Teachers: A Partnership" 7. She noted that while some critics continue to reprove the schools, teachers and administrators are joining with parents in developing new approaches to problems.

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5. Sonnenschein, Phyllis. Parents and professionals: an uneasy relationship. Teaching Exceptional Children. v. 14. Nov. 1981, pp.62-65

6. Smith, E. J. and London, C. G. B. A union of school, community, and family. Urban Education. v. 16. Oct. 1981, pp. 247-60.

7. Suchara, Helen T. Parents and teachers: a partnership. Childhood Education. v. 58. Jan.-Feb. 1982, pp. 130-33.

A good school: is responsible first to its students, can be held accountable for its performance, has an accessible administration and faculty, moves toward increased community participation, and keeps in touch with parents. Suggested methods by which teachers can establish communication with parents include making home visits, writing letters of welcome, organizing group meetings of parents, making appropriate brochures and books available to parents, sending memos to parents about class highlights, encouraging parent visits, surveying parents for problems they would like to have discussed, and writing letters of appreciation to parents who have helped with the school program. In addition to these methods, B. K. Amirkham recommended setting up workshops for parents and their children after school so that they can explore activities together. 8. In this way, parents can observe their children's interests and skills development.

Anne Auten was concerned with problem situations between teacher and parent; but she stated that "persistence, even through a series of awkward exchanges, and patience, skill, endurance, and discussing conflicts openly actually can strengthen the partnership between teacher and parent" 9. She stressed that the teacher's attitude will affect effective communication; and that the teacher should demonstrate a reliance on people's basic good will and hopefulness about resolving differences.

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8. Amirkham, B. K. Painless parent ed? but yes! Thrust for Educational Leadership. v. 9. Jan. 1980, pp. 22-23.

9. Auten, Anne. Effective parent-teacher conferences. Reading Teacher. v. 35. Dec. 1981, pp. 358-61.

Parents expect teachers to know their students and value them and be aware of the students' strengths and weaknesses. Parents appreciate it when teachers show that they want to know the parents, that academic information is available to the parents, and that a conference is a team effort.

Ron Schreider felt that teachers must find ways to communicate information about the school program and build a good relationship between teacher and parents because "the failure of many parents to become involved in the academic lives of their children serves as the schools' number one handicap in providing the quality of education society wants and children so richly deserve". 10. The Head Start program did succeed in gaining the support of parents and involving them in their children's learning. Margery Thompson reported that "Evaluation studies of this part of the program have proven beyond doubt that the degree to which parents participated in the day-to-day operations and in program planning had a direct relationship to gains made by Head Start children". 11.

Many authors have suggested that joint parent-teacher partnerships should be productive; but there is little actual research to support the view. The authors of the article "Parent-Teacher Contacts and Student Learning" reported on a study of 398 students in grades one through eight who were reading one to two years below their grade level. 12.

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10. Schreider, R. Parents, teachers and back to the basics. Clearing House. v. 53. Feb. 1980, pp. 285-86.

11. Thompson, M. Head Start teaches lessons board members should learn. American School Board Journal. v. 167. Jun. 1980, pp.31-33.

12. Iverson, B. K., Brownlee, G. D., and Walberg, H. J. Parent-teacher contacts and student learning. Journal of Educational Research. v. 74. Jul.-Aug. 1981, pp. 394-96.

From one to sixteen parent-teacher contacts (conference, telephone call, or note) were made with the parents of 333 of the children. The researchers found that with increased parent-teacher contacts, younger students' reading achievement improved significantly; however, with increased parent-teacher contacts, the achievement of older students decreased. It may be that young students benefit from increased parent-teacher contacts and attention while older ones, perhaps more aware of peer pressure, may not be helped.

Despite the widespread belief that parents and teachers should share information and work cooperatively to better the education of their children, there are some conditions that can either encourage or discourage teachers in initiating communication with parents. Sometimes two conditions must be present to encourage teachers to initiate contact. Gerald Mager identified such factors in his study. 13. Among them are: 1) the teacher's grade level assignment, 2) the number of students in the class, 3) the teacher's education - especially learning experiences focusing on parent-teacher relations, 4) membership in professional organizations, 5) alternative contacts, 6) reasons for contacts, 7) the principal's generalized support of the teacher, 8) the quality of the partnership perceived between the school and the community, 9) the positive or negative outcomes of previous contacts with parents, 10) a sense of the appropriateness of parent contact as part of the teacher's role, 11) the teacher's ease in interpersonal contact situations,

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13. Mager, Gerald, The conditions which influence a teacher in initiating contacts with parents. The Journal of Educational Research. v. 73. May-June 1980. pp. 276-82.

12) the principal's specific support for the practice of contacting parents, 13) a sense of a connection between parent and child attitude and behavior, 14) a sense of parents as interested and having the same values as the teacher, 15) a sense of comfort in being able to meet parental expectations, 16) a sense that parents understand what it is like to be a teacher, 17) a view of parents as unhelpful, and 18) a view that working with parents is a conflict with the teacher role. In addition to these factors, the teacher's years of experience - especially in the same school, his/her perceived socioeconomic status in relation to that of the student's parents, and the distance of the teacher's residence from the school building are conditions which contribute to whether or not the teacher is likely to initiate contact with parents.

According to Mager's study, teachers who saw initiating contact with parents as part of their role did so with considerably more frequency than those who did not. It was an interesting finding that teachers who did not initiate much contact with parents reported a stronger sense of parental support than those teachers who did. Apparently, teachers who have infrequent contact with parents suppose more support than is actually present. A teacher can easily assume the support of the parent until there is an interchange, and then it may become evident that the parent has misconceptions or may not support the school as fully as was thought. Another finding was that teachers who initiated greater parent contacts reported more ease in meeting parent expectations. Perhaps with more information, the parents are better able to understand the efforts but also the limitations of the teacher.

Building positive teacher - parent relationships is essential for the education of the children. As Dorothy Rich and Cynthis Jones stated, "A growing number of parents want to know how they can best help their children educationally. Reaching out to those parents who are ready to help will make the schools' work easier, not harder. It's not doubling the burden of the schools' job; it's lessening it by sharing it with the people who can really make the educational difference." 14.

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14. Rich, Dorothy and Jones, Cynthis. A family affair: education. The Home and School Institute, Washington, D.C. 1977. p. 10.

Chapter Three - Anticipated Outcome

A. General Goal

This practicum was designed to provide additional avenues of communication between the kindergarten and the home and to foster good relationships between the teacher and parents. It was expected that parents would develop an understanding of the kindergarten program and how it can help in their child's development. It was acknowledged that with increased communication more parental concerns might become apparent. Hopefully, these concerns could be alleviated; but certainly nothing could be done about them if they remained unrecognized. A second goal was to increase the number of parent observations in the classroom. And the third goal was to decrease the percentage of unexcused absences.

B. Recording of Contacts and the Assessment

The teacher recorded the number of home visits accepted and made and also the number of teacher-initiated telephone calls. As far as the writer could determine, home visits have not been made by a kindergarten teacher in Anne Arundel County before. There is no released time.

In years past telephone calls were not made to the parents on a regular basis. Thus, the baseline was zero.

Glendale Elementary is a public school; and therefore open to the public at any time. In previous years, the principal especially invited parents to visit in the school one day during American Education Week. No written records were kept as to how many parents visited the kindergarten on that day; however, about six or eight mothers was average.

This year, parents were urged to visit the kindergarten class on a day of their choosing during a two-week period. An aim was to increase visits to the classroom by parents from the six or eight average of previous years to representatives of fifty percent of this year's families. Based on enrollment, the goal was visitors from twenty-five families.

Parents were asked to sign a guest list when they came to observe the class and also at Open House.

In order to assess their reaction to the increased communication, parents were requested to complete a response sheet after the Fall conferences. These response sheets contained seven statements which were to be rated from one (low) to five (high). For the goal of good teacher-parent relationships to be considered as achieved, an average score of 28 was to be earned.

Another aim was to decrease the average number of unexcused absences from the 1.6% of the previous year (2865 total days attendance and forty-six unexcused absences from September through November). This objective was assessed by comparing the attendance registers for the years under study.

Chapter Four - Solution Strategy

A. Discussion of Possible Solutions

According to S. D. Klein and M. J. Schleifer, "The key to effective collaboration between parents and professionals is a thorough understanding of the parents' experiences with the child". 15. They also stated, "We must learn to appreciate the perspectives of others, learn to share with one another, and learn how to learn from one another." This cannot be done by one-way communication from teacher to parent. Good relationships require two-way communication; so possible solutions should include opportunities for both partners to give information and advice and to ask questions.

One solution suggested in the readings was home visits by the teacher. This method quickly lets the parents know that the teacher recognizes the value of the home in the education of the child and the importance of the parents as partners. The child is not viewed only as a school student but as a whole person. In Anne Arundel County, no released time is given to a kindergarten teacher to make home visits; and permission to do so on the teacher's own time has to be requested and granted. Visits made before the start of school provide a relaxed time to meet each child, recognize and address concerns of the child, talk with the parents about the kindergarten program, and answer questions from the parent.

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15. Klein, S. D. and Schleifer, M. J. The Challenge for the 1980's: parent-professional collaboration. The Exceptional Parent. v. 10. Feb. 1980, pp. 2-3.

At the kindergarten level, time is allowed for three parent-teacher conferences per school year. Other conferences can be arranged upon the request of either the parent or the teacher. In actuality, parents very rarely make such a request. This situation could change with better relationships. It should be recognized that the forms used for the conferences are the starting point for discussion by both partners and not just a report from the teacher to the parent.

Parent observations in the classroom are a way for the parents to learn more about their child, about the school program, and about what it is like to be a teacher. The parents can observe how their child interacts with other children, learn about his interests, and have an experience shared with the child. The parents can also see that the teacher has certain limitations and can be realistic in expectations in working together.

An obvious way to initiate two-way communication is to use the telephone. A positive way to use it is to inquire about the child who has been absent and also to let the parent know about something special the child has accomplished.

Regular newsletters giving highlights of classroom activities are a one-way form of communication; but they do reach and inform many people quickly and easily. They may initiate some feedback from parents. They can also help parents begin conversations with their children about what the children are doing in school. This is a very important form of school-home communication.

An open house after school hours provides another way to inform parents about the school program. The parents do not see the children participating in class; but they can view slides showing school activities, examine teaching materials, hear an outline of the kindergarten program, and voice concerns.

Another solution noted in the literature was to sponsor after school workshops in which both the parent and the child participate in an activity. However, because there are two kindergarten sessions, a morning and an afternoon, and because many of the children ride buses, workshops do not seem feasible in this situation.

B. Anticipated Calendar

August 9, 1982	Obtain permission for study
August 10-11, 1982	Telephone parents to arrange home visits
August 16-20, 1982	Make home visits
August 26-31, 1982	Hold parent conferences
September 24, 1982	Issue newsletter
Sept.27 - Oct. 8, 1982	Parent observations
October 12, 1982	Evening open house
October 29, 1982	Issue newsletter
November 1982	Parent observations - American Education Week
November 11-12, 1982	Parent conferences
December 1982	Submit report

C. Solution Selected

Other than reading newsletters, not all parents were able to participate in any one suggested solution. Therefore, the writer decided to use a multi-pronged program to increase communication and improve relationships between home and school.

Permission for the home visits was granted on August 9th by Mr. Marvin Heptinstall, the principal of Glendale School, and also by Mrs. Sally Meyer, the Coordinator of Early Childhood Education, and by Dr. Timothy Dangle, the Coordinator of Research. A list of forty-two children - their addresses, telephone numbers, and guardians' names - was obtained; and the parents were contacted to arrange a time for the visit. Thirty-nine home visits were made between August 12th and August 24th. One family had moved within the community since registering, and neither the school nor the people who had bought their house knew their new address. One mother refused a home visit on the basis that she was caring for her terminally-ill mother, and a visit just was not convenient. Another mother accepted a visit, called to change the date, again called to change the date, and finally called to cancel the visit saying, "Since it is the last week of vacation, I want to spend the time doing things with my children". Some visits were made in the early evening after parents got home from work and two were made on a Saturday. In several instances, children and parents were waiting on the front porch and waved and called when the teacher's car came into view. In four instances, the parents had invited grandparents to be present when the child's teacher came to visit; and six fathers were home and were introduced. At another home, the father could be seen watching TV in the adjoining family room; but he did not join his wife, children, and the visiting teacher.

One mother locked the three older children out of the house during the visit. They stood outside and yelled and pounded on the doors for thirty minutes. One of the childen cut his finger badly and managed to climb in the kitchen window to show his mother; she said, "Good". At the beginning of another visit, the teacher was invited to sit down on the couch. It was soaking wet - with what, is not known.

At still another home, screams could be heard outside. The mother answered the door with a wildly flailing, kicking, wiggling, and screaming boy in her arms. She invited the teacher to come in and sit down on the sofa; and then she dropped the child two or three feet onto the sofa, saying as she did so, "Now he probably won't even talk to you -- he's mule-headed".

During each visit, the teacher introduced the child to two learning games - one for colors and one for set and numeral recognition - and explained the purpose of the games to the parent. Many parents asked questions about the kindergarten program and these were answered as fully as possible. After leaving the house, the teacher wrote down which skills in the assessed areas the child already possessed. Impressions of the child's articulation and language ability were noted. It was also useful to write down other aspects of the visit, such as the names of brothers and sisters and favorite toys or pets, and whether books were evident in the home. This information was immensely helpful when greeting the child and parents again at the pre-school conference.

Parents seemed receptive to the idea of home visits. Several asked why other teachers were not making home visits. The writer explained the visits were not made on school time but were tried as a way of working with the parents to get their child started on a good school experience.

Forty-five thirty-minute conferences were scheduled from eight a.m. until four p.m. on August 27th, 30th, and 31st for the parents of entering children. An overflow of two more conferences were held the morning of August 26th. The children were invited to come with their parents, and they toured the kindergarten classroom. The children and their parents were shown the bathroom and the light switch in there and how to flush the toilet. (Sometimes going to the toilet at school worries small children). They toured the art area and the kitchen area. They were told about some of the items the children cook during the school year. They saw the coat closet and where the games are kept. They operated the water fountain. The speech therapist assessed their speech and language. Then while their parents and the teacher talked, the children played in the housekeeping area or the sandtable or the garage. Most of the children didn't want to leave and had to be promised the play items would still be there when they came back with the other children.

Forty-three twenty-minute conferences were held November 10th, 11th and 12th. Only parents attended these. One child had transferred into class just a few days before, and his mother had had a conference with the previous teacher. Three other parents did not come for a conference. One could not come because she was recovering from an operation, but the teacher and mother talked over the telephone. Another was a single mother who did not come even after the teacher wrote a note saying she would be

happy to come in early or stay late to meet after work. The third was the mother who did not accept a home visit before school because her mother was ill.

Originally, parents were invited to come with their child and observe in the kindergarten on a day of their choice sometime between September 27th and October 8th. They could meet their child's friends, observe the lessons, and watch their child participating in school activities. The visits began as scheduled; however, the kindergarten teachers were requested to attend a meeting at the Board of Education in Annapolis and at it were told to administer the Metropolitan Achievement Test to their children beginning October first. With the practice booklet and make-up tests, the testing involved ten days. An explanation was made to the parents who had indicated they wanted to visit during that period and they were invited to observe on a later date. One father had already requested leave from work so that he could visit in his daughter's class; and he couldn't change the arrangement. He is an hourly wage earner and lost a day's pay because of the change. He walked the child to school the day of his intended visit and met her afterwards. He and his wife observed their daughter and the class a few weeks later.

When a child was absent for two consecutive days, a telephone call was made to the home. The purpose of this was two-fold. First was to let both the child and the parent know that the child was missed in school. Second was to mention something the class had done during that time so that the parent realized the child was missing a learning opportunity. Most parents were astounded to receive a call from the teacher when their child stayed home.

The teacher also asked to speak with the child and gave him/her messages from classmates. Many children, upon returning after an absence, remarked to the teacher, "You called me." They also told the other children, "The teacher called me."

Newsletters were sent home with the children on September 24th, October 4th, October 29th, and November 29th. These first were read and approved by Mr. Heptinstall. Initially, only two newsletters were planned during this period. The newsletter dated October 4th was added to explain to parents about a change in the visiting schedule because of unexpected Maryland State Department of Education testing. However, Mr. Heptinstall planned to send out a special letter about the testing, so the explanation was deleted from the teacher's letter and, since the remainder of the mimeograph was already approved, that section was run off and sent home. The letter dated November 29th was added because parents' comments were very positive about this form of communication.

An open house was held the evening of October 12th in conjunction with the first P-TA meeting. A slide/tape presentation about the kindergarten program in Anne Arundel County was shown. In addition, teaching materials were on display, and the teacher outlined a typical day's schedule and presented the goals for the year.

Chapter Five - Results, Conclusions, and Recommendations

A. Results

It would have been much better to conduct the pre-study survey before the teacher met the parents. However, since the list of kindergarteners was not available until late August, the writer asked the parents to complete the response sheet upon the initial contact. There were forty-eight pre-study response sheets. The parents at the time of first meeting indicated they were pleased that a teacher would initiate home visits. This may be reflected in appendices C and F. Because of transfers - both into and out of the class - there were eight fewer post-study response sheets. Parental reaction to the increased communication is charted in the appendices (B, C, D, E, F, G, and H). One response sheet turned in at the end of the study totaled only ten. The writer does not know if there is a very dissatisfied parent (there is no indication of such) or if the parent did not understand that one was low and five was high. Scores for the seven items on the pre-study sheet averaged 23.2 and for the post-study sheet averaged 32.1; so the goal of a score of 28 was attained. A study of the results shows a steady shift from the lower scores to the higher. Two parents wrote notes on the post-study sheet. One stated: "I'm in favor of the newsletters keeping me informed on the activities. The children don't always bring this info home. I also enjoy being able to come observe the children." The second parent wrote: "I like the newsletters."

The goal of decreasing unexcused absences also was reached. For the first three months of 1981-82, there were forty-six unexcused absences for 2865 days present, which gave an average of 1.6%. For the same period in 1982-83, there were seventeen unexcused absences for 2413 days present, for

an average of .7%. Some of this difference may represent improved home-school communication in notifying the teacher of the cause of the child's absence. However, it is hoped that a part of the difference is caused by increased awareness on the parents' part of the importance of kindergarten in their child's development. Several parents have come to the classroom when their children are absent to find out what the class is studying so they can help their children at home.

Thirty-nine home visits were made in the two weeks before school started. Judging by parents' comments, those that were made were helpful to the entering kindergarteners and their parents. The visits were very worthwhile to the teacher. Some children were not registered until after school started on August 25th, and these children and the teacher did not meet until the conference days. It was interesting that the only crying that occurred at school was among these late-registrants. Of special interest are the two parents who did not accept a home visit. One mother, who said she could not accept a home visit because she was caring for her ill mother, has been late each month sending in snack money, did not give permission for her daughter to go on class trips, sometimes did not send notes after the child was absent, and did not accept a conference in November. The other mother, who did not accept a home visit because she "wanted to spend the time doing things with my children", first did not come for her conference and then, after being called, came on the wrong date and the wrong time. At the end of November, her child had been absent more than any other, but there was always a written excuse that the child had been ill. This mother did come to observe in the classroom. Telephone calls have been made to both families. (In January - after the study was completed - both mothers unexpectedly came to talk with the teacher after

school.) Another incidental development during the home visits was that two mothers volunteered to come help in the classroom and several more volunteered during the first parent conferences. These parents were trained; and now there are nine mothers who assist by turns with the morning session and three who assist with the afternoon session. This may or may not have a connection with the emphasis on increased communication; but it is certainly more parent volunteers than have been available in other years.

All of the parents came and brought their children to the first conference in August. As noted earlier, two parents did not accept a conference in November. One of these was the working mother of the little girl whose babysitter was not getting her to school. When that situation was discovered, the mother said she appreciated being notified. They have since left the school area. The other mother came six weeks later to talk with the teacher.

Thirty-seven parents came to observe in the classroom. Their signatures are in Appendix I. These parents represented thirty-five different families. Thus, the goal of visitors from twenty-five families was far surpassed. The visitors stayed anywhere from forty-five minutes to the entire session; and several stayed afterwards to discuss their observations with the teacher. Even those who left early took advantage of some quiet moment during the session to comment on how much they had enjoyed the experience and appreciated being invited. One mother came to observe and said she had enjoyed it so much she was going to tell her husband all about it. The husband came a few days later; and since then, both the wife and the husband have helped with class projects.

Teacher-initiated telephone calls after a child had been absent two days numbered twenty-two to twenty different families. However, this should be changed so that, at least a few times, the teacher would contact the parents after one absence. The child who had the most unexcused absences (eight days), was a girl whose babysitter just was not walking her to school. The girl missed one day at a time, mostly rainy days. The single mother, who worked, did not know until she was contacted that the child was not attending school regularly.

Reaction to the newsletters was uniformly favorable. One mother sent a note stating: "I enjoyed your Sept. 24 letter to the parents. You've accomplished a lot in a few weeks. Will this be a monthly newsletter?" During the discussion at the Open House a father mentioned receiving the letters and that he appreciated them because his child didn't talk much about school. The other parents also liked them. The newsletters may be read in the appendix (J, K, L, and M).

Sixteen parents attended the Open House the evening of October 12th. (Appendix N). They viewed the slide/tape presentation, listened to the daily schedule and the plans for the year, and then brought up their own concerns. Several stayed and exchanged views until almost ten o'clock. The slide/tape presentation would have been much more effective if the pictures had been made at Glendale School. Perhaps that can be done before the next Open House.

B. Conclusions

The goals of this practicum were attained. Parents indicated on the post-study response sheets an increased awareness of the importance of the kindergarten program. The goal of having as visitors and observers in the

classroom representatives of at least half the families was surpassed. And the goal of decreasing unexcused absences was reached.

C. Recommendations

The writer would recommend other kindergarten teachers try these methods of reaching out to parents. Understanding has increased on both sides of the home-school partnership.

D. Dissemination

A copy of this report is to be read by the school principal, Mr. Heptinstall, and by the Area Director, Dr. Milbourne. Copies of the abstract will be distributed to other teachers in the school.

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APPENDIX A

On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being low and 5 high, please rate your opinion to the following statements:

1. I know the school policies concerning kindergarten. 1 2 3 4 5 NA

2. The teacher is available to discuss my concerns. 1 2 3 4 5 NA

3. Opportunities are offered to observe my child [illegible] 1 2 3 4 5 NA

4. [illegible] 1 2 3 4 5 NA

5. The teacher shares my concerns about my child 1 2 3 4 5 NA

6. [illegible] 1 2 3 4 5 NA

7. [illegible] 1 2 3 4 5 NA

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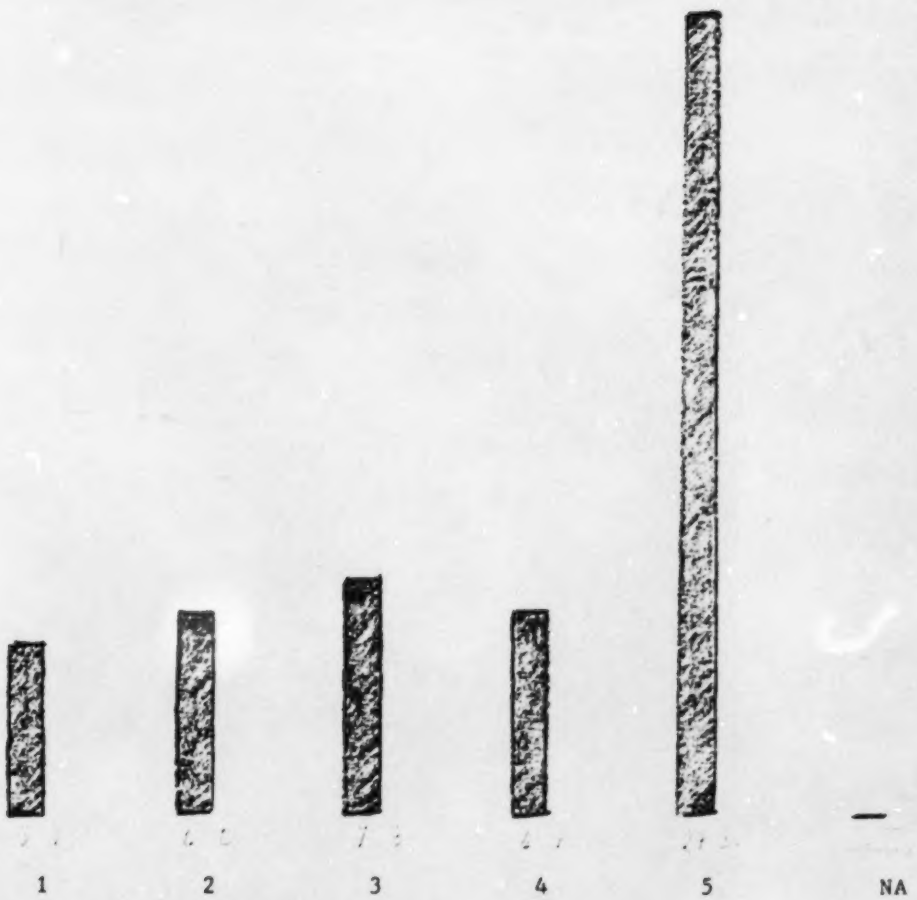
1. I know the school policies concerning kindergarten.

   - Pre-study survey (48 forms)
     Post-study survey (40 forms)

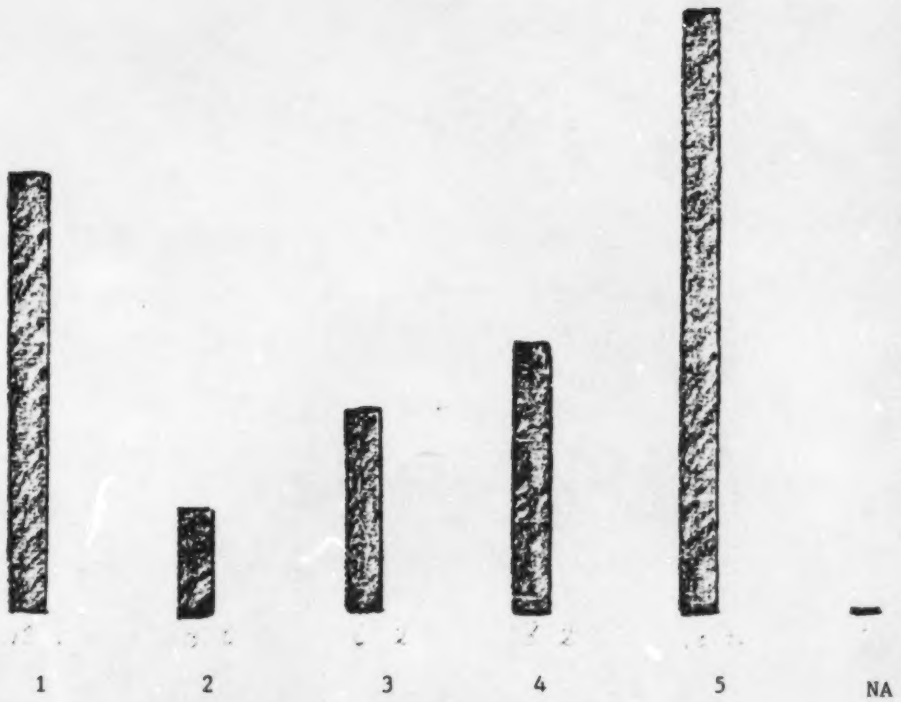
2. The teacher is available to discuss my concerns.

- Pre-study survey (48 forms)
  Post-study survey (40 forms)



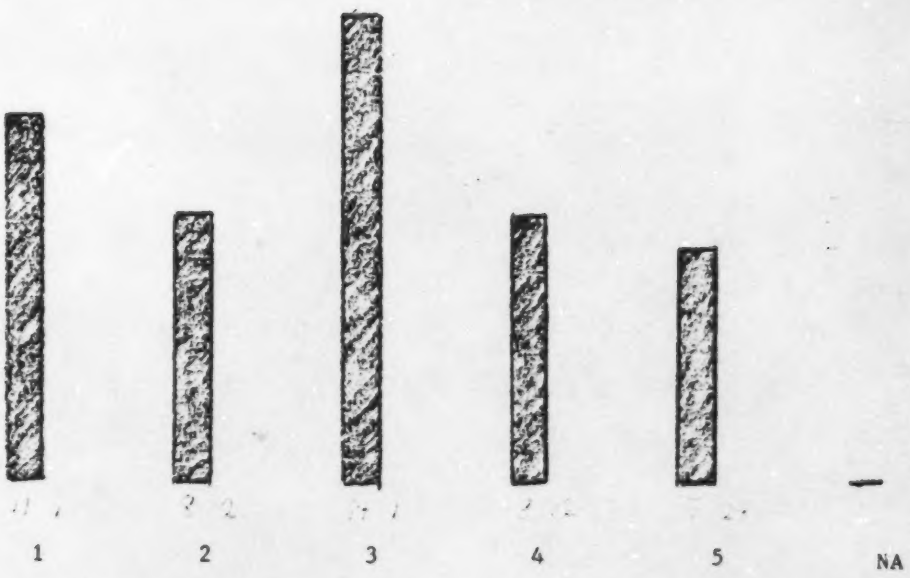
3. Opportunities are offered to observe my child participating with his/her classmates.

- Pre-study survey (48 forms)
  Post-study survey (40 forms)



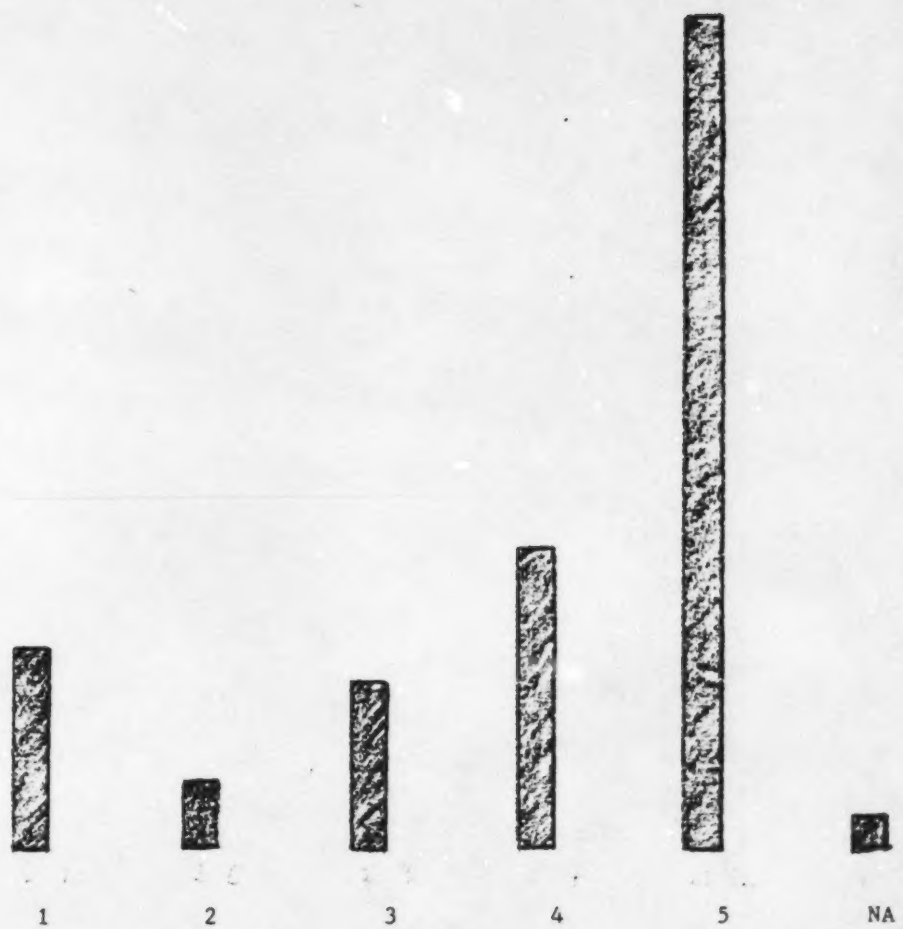
4. I understand the academic program offered in my child's class.

- Pre-study survey (48 forms)
  Post-study survey (40 forms)



5. The teacher shares my concerns about my child.

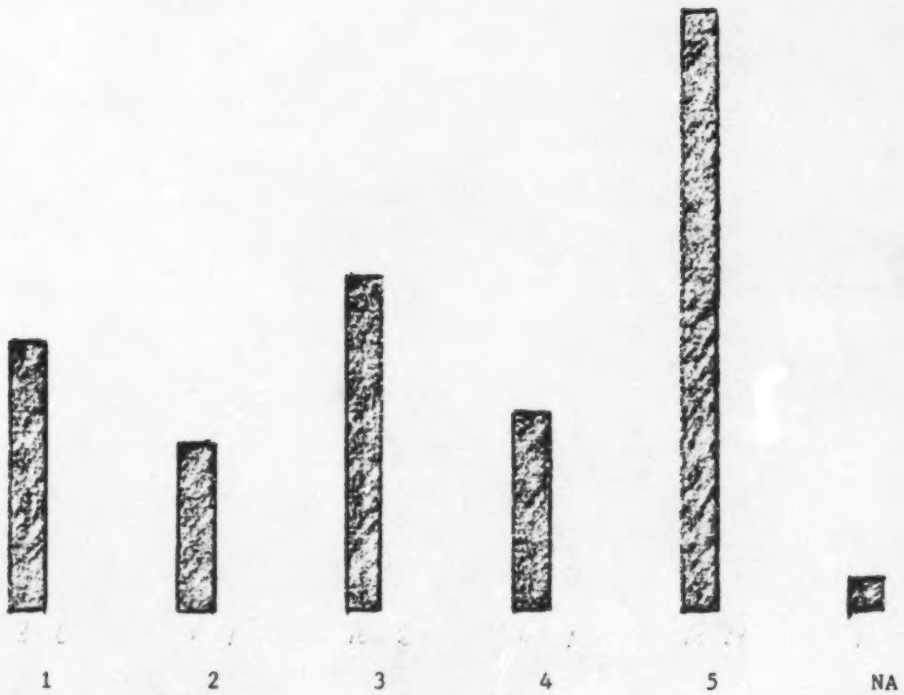
- Pre-study survey (48 forms)
  Post-study survey (40 forms)



6. Information is offered on how I can further help my child at home.

- Pre-study survey (48 forms)

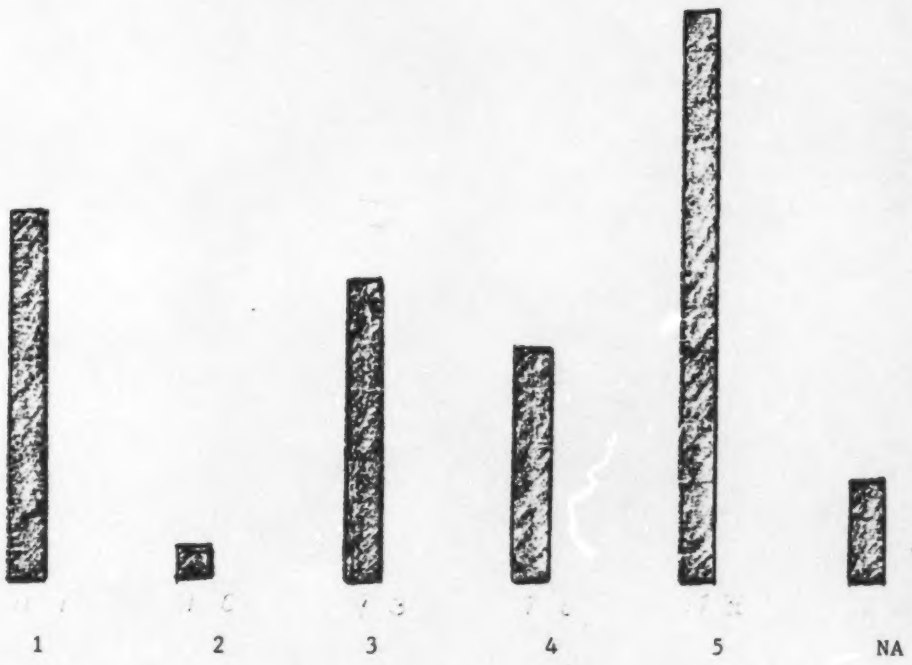
  Post-study survey (40 forms)



7. I am kept informed of my child's progress in kindergarten.

— Pre-study survey (48 forms)

Post-study survey (40 forms)



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APPENDIX K

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20 October 1981

Glendale Elementary School
Mrs. Goodrich's Kindergarten

APPENDIX L

Dear Parents,

Since the last newsletter, several really nice things have happened. The Fire visit to our classroom of Smokey the Bear, who told the children how to prevent fires. When this past Wednesday, the class toured the fire station on South Highway. The next day, some of the children dictated a thank you to the Fire Fighters, for which illustrated stories about their visit. Some of the stories and pictures are up on our bulletin board, so you are welcome to stop by and see them. The children and I thank the parents and grandparents who accompanied us on our tour of the fire station. When I took the children's thank you letters to the fire station, Fire Fighter Terry commented that the Glendale Kindergarten class was one of the best behaved groups he'd had visit.

Many parents have come to observe in the classroom. In the beginning before the children have been learning about the farm. To develop vocabulary skills when talking on moving about and busy animals; and to develop auditory skills, we listened and identified sounds heard on a farm. We've learned some songs about farm animals. The children's favorite seems to be "Old McDonald Had a ". We've illustrated and then burned it on wooden boards for each.

The children have also enjoyed learning some songs and fingerplays for Halloween. We cut pumpkins and made jack-o-lanterns. We used some of our prizes to count the pumpkin seeds and tasted them at each time. The children have also been busy preparing for Halloween. Some were surprised when they used the black crepe paper to make the children anyone ghosts. They had seen a couple of what happens, but their faces were really funny when their ghost appeared.

Another thing we've been working on capital and lower-case letters. The children have viewed two filmstrips: "The Alphabet Soup Factory" (about capital letters) and "The Alphabet Zoo" (about lower-case letters). We've also had a story about the Alphabet Letter Parade. When your kindergartener asks about a letter, please help it as "capital-one" or "lower-case-one".

I have combined the first science unit and the introductory math. Both are fourth describing, attributes and classifying. We've had lessons about wood and bark. Leaves and fruit, color, and shape. I'm encouraging the children to use descriptive words. We've played "guess" where the children have had to pick out one of the objects using the description.

For snacks recently, we've had apple juice; and one day the children made pudding. I've already mentioned the burnt and crackers and pumpkin seeds. We have on hand bananas and also celery to be stuffed with peanut butter.

With cold weather coming, the children do need to learn how to dress their own selves. Please help them to practice at home. Each year, I tell the kindergarteners I'll help them until Christmas; but I expect them to be able to do it. When that however, it takes a long time to fasten coats before we go outside; so it would be help to start practicing now. Let your child keep up his/her arm work, too.

Some mothers have attended the cooking for volunteers and are very busy in classroom. Mrs. Matsuniak and Mrs. Miller have helped during the afternoon session Mrs. Collins and helped in the morning. Mrs. Schoolcraft, Susan and Mrs. Crandall plan to help the children. We all welcome the mothers and truly appreciate their help.

Another month has gone by. Please remember to send [illegible] for the November

Parent-teacher conferences will be on Thursday through Friday, November 12th through 13th. There is no school for students on the [illegible] the kindergarteners will attend school on Tuesday, November 10th, Veterans Day substitute teacher. There will not be school on Thursday, November 26th, November 27th. Please do try to make [illegible] conferences. We have a great [illegible] about concerning your child.

Thank you for your help.

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